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Women Ready for Green Jobs

Non-profit dedicated to the success in the trades

BY MINDY COOPER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Dedicated to the success and empowerment of women in the trades, one local organization is on a mission to help women pursue employment in the growing green jobs industry, which continues to open up new opportunities for working residents throughout the country.

Founded in 1989 as a small support group led by four tradeswomen, including an elevator constructor, two carpenters and an operating engineer, Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc. became a non-profit in 1999 to help women pursuing jobs in building, labor, mechanical, electrical and utility trades attain economic and job security.

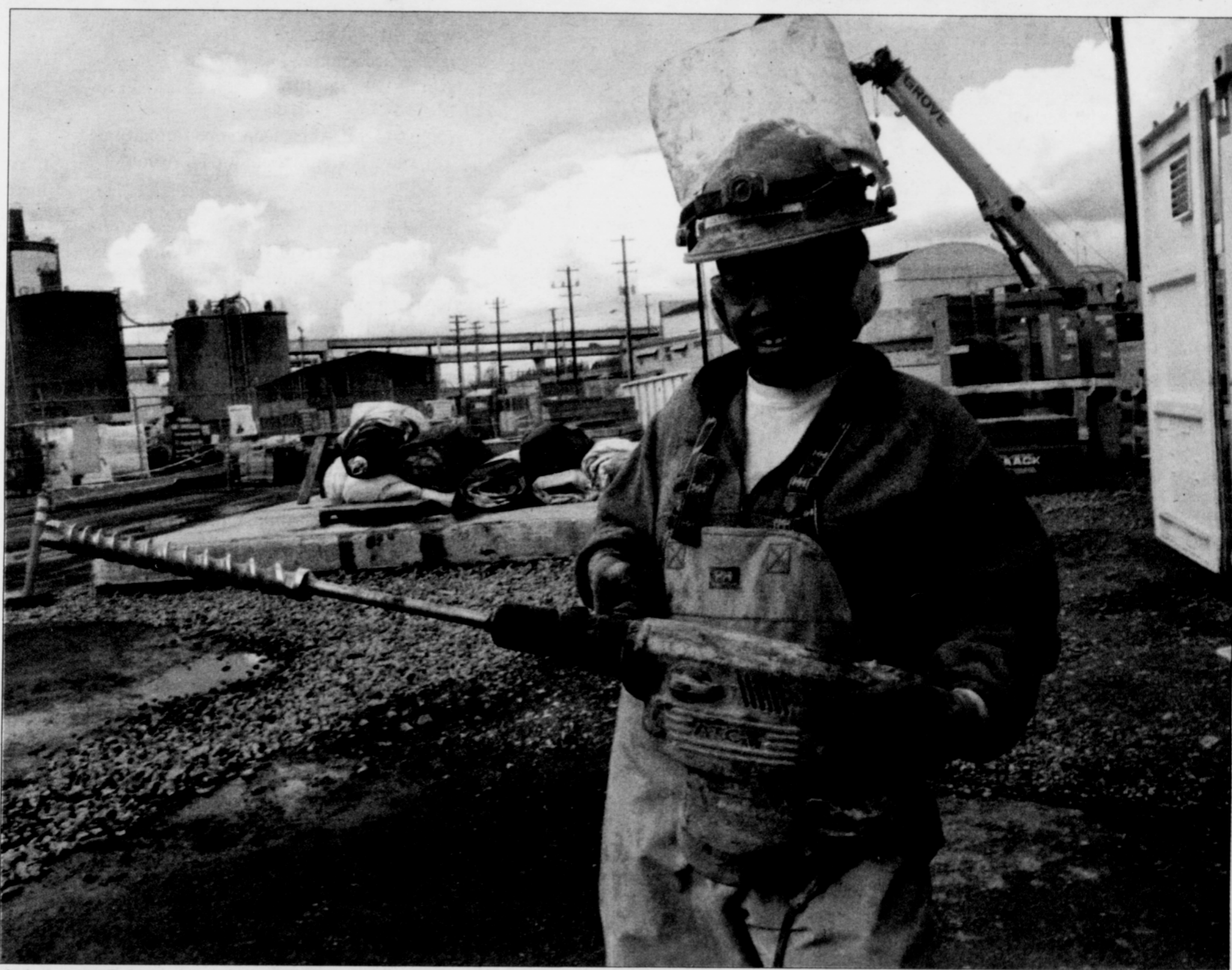
Today, the organization has helped thousands of women become successful employers and empowered individuals through the organizations free pre-apprenticeship training programs, workshops and career resources.

"Our role is to help women learn about these exciting blue collared fields that have great pay and benefits and are typically very rewarding work," said executive director Connie Ashbrook. "Once woman learn these jobs are available and know how to get into them, with our help, they are very enthusiastic about working in the trades."

Although a handful of pre-apprenticeship programs exist throughout the state, Ashbrook said Oregon Tradeswomen is the only training program in Oregon that focuses exclusively on women.

One goal of the organization is to eliminate the myth that you have to be big and beefy to be successful in the trades. "The truth is that all kinds of people of many sizes and shapes are very successful," she said.

Ashbrook, who worked as an elevator constructor for 14-years,



Anjeanette Brown, a graduate of the pre-apprenticeship program with the non-profit Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc., a group dedicated to the success of women in the trades industry.



Johnetta Abraham, a graduate of the pre-apprenticeship program with Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc., is on a journey to become a cement mason to support her family.

said she knows from first-hand experience that women, who often don't realize these jobs exist, can be successful in these fields.

After hands-on skill training with power tools, field trips to job sites and apprenticeship training centers, classroom learning with speakers from the trades, and education in math and measuring skills, she said the women gain an understanding of construction culture and begin to build a career plan.

"The training provides our students with the skills they need to be successful," she said. "Last year, 116 women graduated from the seven-week training program, and 82 of our graduates got jobs right away."

Although women make up almost 50 percent of the workforce

nationwide, they make up a mere three percent in skills trades.

In Oregon, however, the numbers are higher than they are nationally because of our work, she said.

The Safeway Foundation, after recognizing OTI's commitment to the success of women in the workforce, presented a grant award last week of \$5,000 to Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc. at their northeast store location on Northeast Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

The funding will provide critical support services to students graduating from OTI's free, pre-apprentice program and will assist women in acquiring the necessary attire and tools needed to start work in the construction trades, such as safety

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